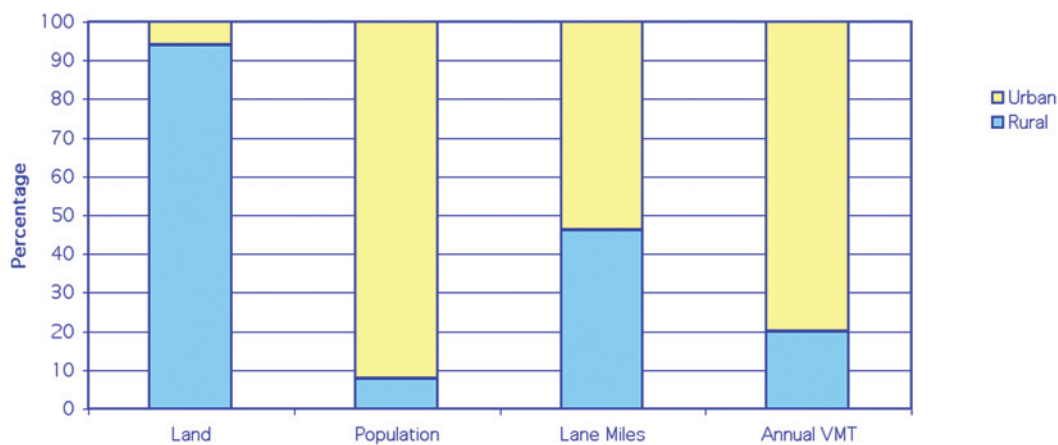


RURAL ISSUES

Rural issues, while as acute as those in urban areas, have very different characteristics. With only eight percent of California's population, rural areas comprise 94 percent of the land area (see **Figure 15**). Providing transportation services to a sparsely and widely distributed population presents special transportation challenges that must be considered when planning for a balanced, interconnected system.

FIGURE 15

California Rural and Urban Transportation Statistics (2001)



Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Highway Statistics.

Rural transportation issues may vary depending on the area's economic base, topography, or proximity to urban areas and popular destinations. There are, however, many areas of common need.

Integrity of the existing road system is a significant concern in rural areas. With approximately 46 percent of the road miles located in rural areas, the proportion of road miles to population creates a far larger responsibility without the economic means to address it. Weather issues exacerbate road condition problems, particularly where flooding, landslides, and snow removal can quickly jeopardize pavement integrity. **Figure 16** indicates the condition of California's rural roads using data collected by FHWA.

California's economy relies on the efficient movement of interregional commercial trucking. While rural areas might experience substantial goods movement traffic and associated air quality effects, they typically receive inadequate transportation resources to address the impacts.

For more than 50 consecutive years, California has been the number one food and agricultural producer in the nation. The State's agricultural output is nearly \$25 billion per year. This makes truck access of particular importance in bringing food and timber to the world. These large trucks take a substantial toll on the local road systems that feed into the State highways, not only in traffic volumes, but also in impacts to pavement conditions.

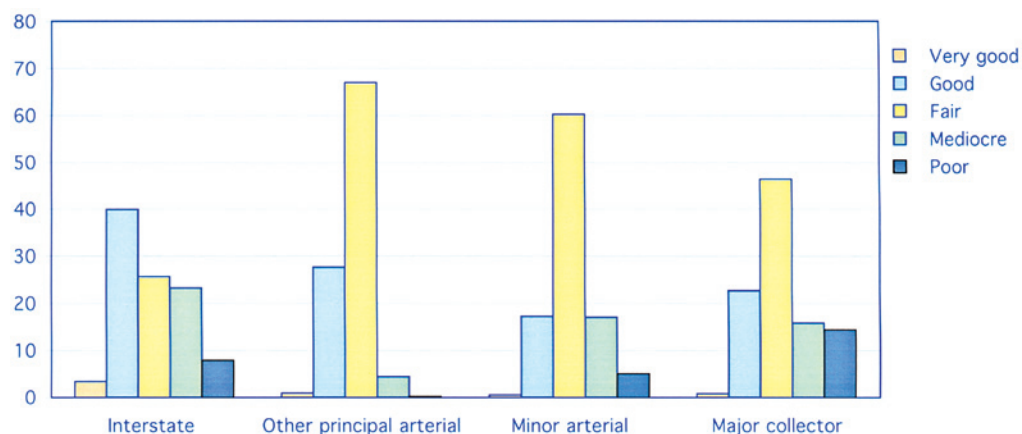
California's travel and tourism industry generated an estimated \$82.5 billion, and supported over 893,000 jobs in 2004. Destinations in rural areas are major attractors for State, national, and international travelers. For example, Yosemite, Sequoia, Joshua Tree, Cabrillo, and Death Valley National Parks, Point Reyes National Seashore, and Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area attracted nearly 11 million visitors in fiscal year 2000/2001.³⁹ Rural tourism, and consequently rural economies, are dependent on a well-maintained and reliable roadway system, yet the roadways are inadequate to serve the demand.

Safety is another significant concern in rural areas. Nationally, over 58 percent of the total fatalities occur in rural areas. The rural fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled is more than twice that of urban areas. The higher fatality rate could be attributed to many factors including rugged terrain, shortened sightlines, unforgiving roadways, faster speeds, alcohol, longer response time to accidents, and distance to medical treatment centers.

For some rural residents, transit service is the only means of transportation. Rural entities are often challenged to provide transit and paratransit services to rural customers sparsely distributed over considerable distances. Regional and intercity bus service can be difficult to provide due to low demand, fare box return requirements, and limited resources for operating and maintaining the system.

FIGURE 16

Rural Road Conditions in California (2000)



Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Highway Statistics.

³⁹ California Travel and Tourism Commission, "California Fast Facts 2005," August 2005.

Intercity bus transportation is an important part of the California’s overall surface transportation network and holds particular importance to smaller communities and rural areas. It provides a critical service for smaller communities in which air or passenger rail is not readily available, and, even when these options are available, intercity bus may be more affordable. Since the 1980s, national carriers have abandoned many of the rural intercity bus routes, severely reducing rural mobility.

Rural area airports provide vital access for lifeline medical emergencies, fire fighting, and agricultural operations. These airports also provide links to larger urban airports for passenger and air cargo service. As commercial airports reach passenger and cargo capacity, demand will shift to regional and rural airports to provide general aviation services. Many rural airport runways need to be extended to accommodate larger aircraft.

Rural areas do not have the communication infrastructure that urban areas enjoy. Lack of wireless communication directly affects safety and increases information and advanced transportation systems infrastructure deployment costs.

Transportation plays a crucial role in the sustainable development of rural areas and communities. Pedestrian-oriented main streets in the historical rural downtowns of California have served as examples for improving urban environments. These rural main streets should continue to reflect the community’s values and character, while enhancing the rural economy by facilitating goods movement and access to goods, services, and jobs.

While many of the strategies discussed in the previous sections are applicable to rural needs, the following strategies address specific rural issues.

Partners:

Agricultural sector	Health and human services providers
Airport operators	Regional Transportation Planning Agencies
Business community	Rural advocacy groups
California Department of Transportation	Rural communities and counties
Educators	Tourism sector
Emergency response providers	Transit and paratransit operators
Environmental advocates	Transportation advocates

Strategies:

- Ensure rural areas have adequate funds to provide for the operation, maintenance, and rehabilitation of the rural and interregional transportation system.
 - Provide for roadway safety improvements and efficiencies.
 - Provide flexible funding for fund matching opportunities with other programs.
 - Consider interregional traffic, including goods movement and tourism, and weather impacts when allocating resources to rural entities.

- Ensure critical transportation facilities, such as general aviation airports, are adequately funded to provide lifeline services.
- Upgrade communication, including emergency response entities in the early planning stages, to enable deployment of advanced transportation systems to improve safety, incident response, and traveler information.
- Advocate coordinated public transportation services with social service agencies to optimize resources and services.
 - Consult with Native American Tribal Governments to coordinate improved public transportation access to and through tribal lands.
 - Initiate effort with full participation of federal, State, regional, and local governments to explore funding options and opportunities and to address potential barriers.
 - Identify best practices including advanced public transportation technologies to improve and coordinate services.
- Consider the “main street” characteristics of transportation corridors and incorporate community values and context sensitive solutions.
- Explore alternatives to moving goods through rural areas to mitigate impacts on infrastructure and air quality.
- Protect rural airports from incompatible land use encroachment.